

THE PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER EDUCATION FOR ISAT MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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Abstract: International students are in need of a character education program that exceeds national boundaries. The researcher will investigate the perceptions international middle school administrators have on character education and character traits, and to what extent is international middle school administrators prepared to provide leadership in character education. The population will be the International School Association of Thailand, ISAT, which comprises of 75 international schools nationwide. The context of character education and international schools are explored in a brief literature review to give background and insight into the significance of the study. Then, the development of a comprehensive international character education program will be produced as a result of the findings from the research.

Keywords: Character Education Program, International Middle School Administrators, ISAT

International schools in Thailand acquire their character development programs from other countries, other curriculums, or as a result of internal assessments of character development practices within their schools. Some international schools adopt character education programs outright, while others take parts of programs to use in the development of their students' character. While some international schools teach character through a rigorous curriculum such as Middle Years Program, which is part of the International Baccalaureate Diploma program.

There are varieties of character education programs that are nationwide in America, as well as in other countries. International schools like the International School Bangkok, has adopted these programs and parts of these programs to "fit" their educational institutional needs. Gellar (2002) states that international schools have two distinguishing features, an international curriculum and a set of ethical universal values. A consistent picture has emerged (Heyward, 2002) of transnational learners possessing certain traits, such as strong self-esteem and advanced social skills (Langford, 1998). Students appear to receive a slightly different international school experience (Hayden & Thompson, 1995), and emerge with a deeper sense of international

understanding (Hinrichs, 2003). The problem is that these programs do not effectively address the transient nature of international school students nor the developmental traits and behaviors these particular students need.

This is a problem for this population of students because they move from country to country depending upon the requirements of their parent's employment. Because they do not settle in one location for a long period of time, their character becomes vulnerable to this transient nature of their lifestyle. Therefore, students tend to associate themselves with peers who are like them for safety and security purposes. National, privileged students who attend international schools, because of their elite status in their communities, tend to need further support in developing and maintaining their ethical practices. If international schools do not address this problem, they will continue to produce students who do not interact with peers from multicultural backgrounds, students who continue to fear and resist engagement with peers who are not like them, and continue to develop students who do not understand the benefit of interacting with students from diverse backgrounds. Character traits need to be explored in greater depth, consistent with the advanced level of maturity and savvy international middle school students possess. In this age of global citizenship, international mindedness and multicultural ethnicity, international schools need to enhance the culture of their schools by developing character behaviors and traits in their students that transcends country boundaries.

To understand what character education is, we must first dissect the parts of the whole, character and education. Character is the mental and moral qualities distinctive to individuals. It is the strengths, weaknesses and originality in a person's nature. At the center of a person's nature is their psychological processing and communication ability. How we interpret and respond requires mental and emotional intervention. These interventions need to be developed socially as well as emotionally to include morals, values, and ethics to positively influence one's decisions and behaviors. Education is the process individuals go through to gain intelligence and learn knowledge, morals, ethics, and values to be productive in their communities. Therefore, Character Education is the multifaceted development process of complex psychological characteristics and behaviors that enables an individual to act as a moral agent (Berkowitz & Beir, 2004).

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Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1947) professed, "Intelligence plus Character is the goal of education." Character education develops the mental and physical habits and behaviors students need to be active, engaged, productive citizens in their communities. Schools are the primary source of education within a community therefore; schools have the best opportunity to develop prosocial skills, core ethical values, morals and behaviors. For this reason, students need to be successful academically and be able to apply these character traits to their decision-making process throughout their lives. According to Berkowitz & Bier (2008), and Smagorinsky & Taxel (2005), character education combines moral knowledge, social reasoning and emotional motivation as ingredients for the recipe for behavior. These behaviors are the moral actions inspired by prosocial development.

Morality is the intrinsic standard students base all decisions off. These standards are grounded in the unified belief of what is right and wrong as defined by societies. In 1958, Lawrence Kohlberg identified stages and levels of morality children go through as they develop which are based on cognitive reasoning (Kohlberg, 1981). Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development includes three levels and six stages. In level two, Conventional Morality, children believe that everyone in their community share the same view and understands the nature of being good and how to act accordingly. Stage 3 of level 2, Good Interpersonal Relationships, equates this level as representing children who are between the ages of 11 to 14 years old. In the school setting, this period of their education is called the middle school years, grades 6-8. At this age, children (students) develop mental capacities to understand the intricacies of morality. They form beliefs on families, communities, and friends as to how they should behave in good ways. They understand that the nature of good means the way they act, live and communicate towards others. This stage is often referred to as the "good boy-good girl" orientation of moral development, and is focused on living up to social expectations and roles (Cherry, 2010). There is an emphasis on conformity, being "nice," and consideration of how choices influence relationships. The development of prosocial skills occurs here and feelings such as love, empathy, trust, concern for others, and care. Children begin to reason about their interpersonal relationships with close friends and family to get to know them better and to express their feelings towards them.

The social cognitive processes children develop were studied intensely by Albert Bandura. According to Bandura (1971, 1977, 1978, 1986), learning consists of the cognitive processing and decision making skills, which encompasses a three-

way relationship between behavior, the environment, and internal events that influence perceptions and actions. Therefore learning results in the acquisition of verbal and visual codes of behavior that may or may not later be performed. Bandura believes that learning is accomplished by watching others (observations) and the environment, and by reading and learning about the achievements of others (role models). Bandura theorizes how observational learning occurs in learners through attention, retention, motor reproduction and motivation. Together, they provide insight as to how development occurs individually in students. Therefore, if students are provided the right environment (schools) to explore how to behave within their community (behavior), they can reflect on their experience (internal) and judge their actions against their level of moral beliefs. This process will develop their character, enriching their ability to become moral agents, as well as become better students.

Developing students academically and characteristically, better prepares them for the workplace. Forming mental habits that compliment academic rigor creates students who are problem solvers, motivated learners and overall better students. There is evidence of the link between academic achievement and character education among elementary schools in California. The earliest study conducted was based on the California School Recognition Program where 681 schools were examined (Benniga, Berkowitz, Kueben & Smith 2003). A rubric was developed to measure traits of character education programs to student scores on the Stanford Achievement Test 9th edition test, and the California's Academic Performance Index. The researchers found that schools with high character education scores also had high academic scores.

The authors, Osher, Bear, Sprague, and Doyle (2010), discuss in their article, *How Can We Improve School Discipline*, three approaches to improve school discipline. The first one explored complex approaches to classroom management. They suggested a change from focusing on addressing the student's behavior to addressing the classroom setting. To maximize the classroom setting, divide the class into time segments and prepare lessons that would allocate behavior to focus on the task within each time slot. Then the risk of behavior distractions would be greatly reduced, due to the students' focus on the immediate task. If the students know what is going to happen within these allotted amounts of time, then they will need to use the appropriate behaviors to perform tasks needed for that lesson. Teachers would then need to introduce, model and teach effective behavior techniques necessary to be used for particular tasks. Students would engage those

behaviors to complete the task putting effort back in to academics. Although norms, rules, and interpersonal relationships play a part in the overall picture of classroom management, ecologists emphasize that it is the strength and the stability of the programs of action embedded in particular activities that create and maintain classroom order (Doyle, 2006). Character education not only identifies behaviors but also promotes prosocial skills that allows for effective student group settings. Interpersonal and intrapersonal skills development ensures that students can work in diverse group settings harmoniously. Then and only then, can teachers have time to go deeper into lessons and motivate students to reach their academic potential. Therefore, teachers and administrators play a vital role in character development.

Traditionally, character education was the responsibility of adults to pass on the core ethics and morals, community's value about attitude, behavior, and knowledge from one generation to the next. Now, teachers are tasked with this responsibility and for them to do it successfully, they must possess high ethical and moral standards that transfers into their professionalism that is modeled for students daily. Therefore, the interactions between students and teachers will further develop students' character because of the character teachers bring into the classroom. Teachers themselves must be authentic leaders in the classroom community and in the greater school alongside administrators of character education.

Authentic leadership speaks to the core ethical values and positive psychological qualities leaders portray as a means to develop trusting and connecting relationships with their followers (Northouse, 2010). Authentic leaders are role models because they lead with conviction and their actions and decision-making skills are based heavily on their morals and values. The authentic element of their leadership evolves over time through the interactions between their followers to motivate change by affecting the beliefs and values of their followers. Therefore, teacher-to-student interactions are affected by the authenticity of the conviction of teachers' influence over their students.

For school administrators to be effective at implementing a character education program, they need to possess the necessary character traits to lead this transformational change. Transformational Leadership is the process whereby the school leader, engages with his faculty, staff, parents, community, stakeholders and students to bridge a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower (Northouse, 2010). This type of leadership requires leaders to display charisma, trustworthiness, creativity, and high levels of

articulation skills. They have effective communication skills and navigate through their organization with positive self-regard. It is the process of engaging with others to create a connection that increases motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower (Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders are fully aware of the capabilities and needs of their followers and attend to them in efforts to motivate them and inspire them to continue to work hard and strive for excellence. Transformational leaders engage their followers to make real connections with tasks, reforms, improvements, initiatives, or goals being accomplished in order to maximize the effect of the change. Transformational leadership describes the way leaders can initiate, develop, and carry out significant changes in organizations (Northouse, 2010). By being strong role models, with attractively high levels of confidence, competence and articulation, transformational leaders become the change that they want initiated within the organization. Therefore, school leaders model the character they want their teachers to demonstrate and in turn, teachers model the behavior they want their students to develop. This relationship expands the culture of the school to make it more inclusive to diversity and multiculturalism.

According to the Character Education Partnerships, widely recognized as America's leading organization in the field of character education, they define school culture as-all aspect of school life, including a safe and caring environment, a powerful pedagogy and curriculum, student motivation and engagement, professional faculty culture and relationship trust, parent partnerships, and community collaboration. Elbot and Fulton (2008), suggest, "A school's culture has far more influence on life and learning in the schoolhouse than the state department of education, the superintendent, the school board, or even the principal can ever have." Therefore, school culture must cultivate an environment where everyone from the custodian to the administrators, stakeholders to parents, teachers to students, can thrive academically and holistically.

Glanz (2002) states that school leaders need to possess integrity/courage, impartiality, empathy, judgment, enthusiasm, humility, and imagination. Leaders are self-confident and self-aware; they know their own strengths and weaknesses and are understanding of them in others (Schwartz 2008). Effective school leaders know their staff and understand that their abilities are at different levels across the school. Taking this into account, leaders provide the support and professional development to create learning communities to work towards a shared vision, mission, and goals. If the leaders are seen as having strong, high levels of character, their leadership will invite the same qualities amongst the

teachers, students, and across the school community. Therefore, it is imperative that leaders are able to articulate and activate an implementation process successfully, maintain it, and then sustain the program.

Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis created the Character Education Partnership's Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education as standard principles schools need to consider when planning and implementing a character education program. The CEP believe character education should promote core ethical values and supportive performance values as the foundation of good character, "Character" must be comprehensively defined to include thinking, feeling, and behavior, effective character education requires a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character development, creates a caring school community, provides students with opportunities for moral action, includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develop their character, and helps them to succeed, strives to foster students' self-motivation, engages the school staff as a learning and moral community that shares responsibility for character education and attempts to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students, fosters shared moral leadership and long range support of the character education initiative, engages families and community members as partners in the character-building effort, and evaluates the character of the school, the school staff's functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.

Along with their Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education, the Character Education Partnership has published their Character Education Quality Standards as a means for schools to evaluate their character education program. On their website, the CEP recognizes important aspects of what a character education program should look like and created a set of standards to measure them against. This instrument provides a means for educators, administrators, and community members to reflect on current practices, identify short- and long-term objectives, and develop or improve a strategic plan. Berkowitz, M.W., Bier M.C. (2005) concluded that successful character education programs profiled in *What Works in Character Education*, positively affected the following aspects of personal character: Socio-moral reasoning, prosocial behaviors and attitudes, problem-solving skills, knowledge and attitudes about risk behaviors (such as drug use, violence and aggression, and sex), emotional competency, academic achievement, attachment to school, general behavior, personal morality, character knowledge, relationships, communicative competency, and attitudes toward teachers. If character education programs have positive effects on such a wide area of

personal development, then the sum of these aspects must result in an inclusive school culture.

Nelson (2008) and Lee (2001) believes that culturally competent schools demonstrate the ability and capacity to forge a sense of community out of cultural diversity, have the same high academic expectations for every student, present a curriculum that reflects many cultures, provide ways for students to deal with racial/cultural tensions, actively hire a diverse and committed staff of educators, promote continuous staff development, involve parents in the educational process and being sensitive to their cultural needs, define cultural diversity in broad terms to include diverse sexual orientations, religious traditions, age groups, and learning difference. Consequently, character education addresses the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of education, and utilizes all dimensions of school life to foster character development (Glanzer, & Milson (2006), Battistich, V. 2000). The right combination of character and culture will eliminate the "hidden culture" improving a school's capacity to functions harmoniously in conjunction to its vision, mission, and overall effectiveness.

An international school is a school that caters mainly to children who are not nationals of the host country, often the children of the staff of international businesses, international organizations, embassies, NGOs, GOs, missions, missionary programs, as well as the children of international educators. They are also often popular with local elite students who wish to improve their language skills, and obtain higher quality education to qualify for excellent universities, as well as reputedly high standardized and Ivy League universities. The majority of all international schools are private. The types of students that attend international schools are usually expatriates, students living in a foreign land, third culture kid, and social-economic elite national students. These students are usually students whose parents are educated, at least middle class status, professionals and have been afforded educational opportunities superior to their national country provides. These students are multi-lingual, travel, and are raised with heightened expectations and privileges. International students are, for the most part, more mature, advanced for their ages because of their experiences in other countries, and have friends from around the world. Because there is no dominate country or culture, internationals school student populations are a collection of distinguishable countries and cultures mixed in the same melting pot. Students' identities are based on their relationships with other students, teachers, and the community they reside in. Therefore, there are clear implications for international schools and Straffon (2002) argues that a child's experience of

identity formation can be influenced, and to some extent managed, by the school.

The majority of international schools worldwide affiliate themselves with a regional association or organization to align their school to a common identity. The foundational purpose of ISAT is to act as a liaison between international schools that are members and the Ministry of Education of Thailand. Since 1994, with over 75 member schools, the International Schools Association of Thailand (ISAT) has been a unified voice for Thailand's international schools, strengthening Thailand's position as a hub of world-class international education, and articulating and promoting high standards of educational quality and ethical practice. ISAT member schools meet the diverse needs of international mobile families, ease school transitions across the globe and offer the very best in international school standards and practices based on national and/or international educational programs. ISAT support their member schools by promoting their programs because they strongly believe that their students receive a nurturing and supportive learning environment facilitated by experienced and fully qualified educators, challenging every student to reach his/her academic potential.

They believe their students receive the best practices in pedagogy for children to function efficiently, effectively and happily in the complex age of information, communication and technology as well as comprehensive resources and facilities to support well-rounded growth in all areas from academics to extra-curricular activities, including boarding for overseas students. Further, ISAT students receive internationally recognized qualifications favored by worldwide universities, e.g., the international Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma, Advanced Placement (AP), and the British General Certificate of Education Advanced (A) Level. Finally, ISAT students receive an international education focused on producing global citizens who are cross-culturally astute and sensitive, engaged in current issues, and committed to making a difference in the world.

This review of literature describes the current effect character education has on the development of students and school communities. By using this literature as the standard, the researcher will research the perceptions international middle school administrators have on character education and character traits by a questionnaire. On the same questionnaire, the researcher will determine the extent international middle school administrators are prepared to provide leadership in character education. The findings from the research will be used to develop an international character education program.

The significance of this study is to create a character education program exclusively for international middle schools in Thailand. Because of the high level of maturity and sophisticated intellect these students possess, a complex approach coupled with a profound curriculum is needed for increased comprehension. The intention of the development of this program is to enrich already existing character development practices, specifically tied to the nature and nurture of international middle school students.

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